

## Thompson Maxwell's narrative, 1760-1763.

### THOMPSON MAXWELL'S NARRATIVE—1760–1763.1

1 Thompson Maxwell was the son of Hugh, who came from Ireland in 1732 and settled at Bedford, Mass., where he lived until his death, at the age of sixty years, March 19, 1759. Thompson's mother died in January, 1769, aged eighty-one years, leaving a family of five sons and two daughters. Thompson was the youngest, being born Sept. 11, 1742. He served as a volunteer, under Capt. Nehemiah Lovewell, of Dunstable, N. H., in the campaign against the French and Indians, in 1757, helping scour the country between Concord, N. H., and Fitchburg, Mass. He also served under Lovewell in the campaign of 1758, his company being attached to Robert Rogers's rangers. He continued as one of Rogers's corps, through the campaigns of 1759 and 1760, and was present at the fall of Montreal, September 8th of the latter year. Four days after the capitulation, Rogers was ordered by Gen. Sir Jeffrey Amherst "to ascend the lakes with a detachment of rangers, and take possession, in the name of his Britannic Majesty, of Detroit, Michilimackinac, and other western posts included in the capitulation."—(Parkman's *Pontiac*, 6th ed., i., p. 164 et seq.) Maxwell re-enlisted for the war, and accompanied the rangers to the Northwest, in Captain Brewer's company. He arrived at Michilimackinac in October, 1761. In May, 1762, he went upon the first voyage ever made through Lake Superior under the English flag, being one of a military escort sent with a party of traders to the Grand Portage, at the west end of the lake;—see *ante*, p. 123, note 4. In September, 1762, Maxwell went to Detroit. In the spring of 1763, he was on an expedition through Lake Michigan, to Chicago; and afterwards, in the same year, was one of a party sent to reconnoiter a course by land from Detroit to Chicago. He remained at Detroit until the close of the Pontiac war, being one of the participants in Dalzell's fight at Bloody Run. Maxwell was discharged in October, 1763, after six years' hard service, although he was but twenty-one years of age. He married Sibyl Wyman, five years his senior, and she

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left him, after thirty-eight years of happy union, four sons and a daughter. Maxwell was engaged in teaming between Amherst and Boston. At the request of John Hancock, at whose warehouse he was loading his wagon, Dec. 16, 1773, he joined the celebrated Boston tea party. He says in his narrative, concerning this event: "We mounted the ships and made tea in trice; this done, I took my team & went home as an honest man should." In April, 1775, he was again in Boston with his team, and went out to Bedford to join the minute men. He fought at Concord and Bunker Hill, as lieutenant, and was in Gates's army till the spring of 1778, when he reresigned, being vexed at not receiving promotion. Raising a company of volunteer rangers, he operated along the Mohawk and the upper Susquehanna, and in 1779 united his band with Sullivan's army. Upon the conclusion of Sullivan's famous campaign, Maxwell returned home to Buckland, Mass., when he was chosen to represent his town in the state constitutional convention at Cambridge, taking his seat Oct. 28, 1779. He was a militia captain in the Shay rebellion of 1787, and afterwards a delegate to the state convention which accepted the federal constitution. He also served in the Massachusetts legislature of 1796, taking stand in favor of Jay's treaty. In 1800, he removed to Butler county, Ohio, and in 1812 did valiant service at the head of a party of scouts, in piloting Hull's army through to Detroit. After serving as a captain at the desperate battle of Brownstown, with great honor, he was taken prisoner at Detroit, with Hull; and when he returned to his home in October his house was mobbed and burnt, it having been falsely reported that he had favored Hull's surrender. But Lewis Cass and others hastened to befriend the old ranger; and General Miller referred with enthusiasm to the gallant services rendered his country by "Old Major Maxwell." In 1818, Major Maxwell, then seventy-six years of age, made a horseback tour from Detroit,—then his home,—to New England and back, for the sole purpose of revisiting the scenes of his early exploits. He died about 1830, aged some eighty-eight years, and reported to have fought in twenty-two desperate battles. In 1818, a fragmentary narrative of his stirring career was taken down at his dictation by his friend, Gen. James Miller, aided by Lieut. John S. Allanson. This fragment was published in 1865, in the *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, vii., pp. 95–116, where its existence is not generally known, nor is it readily accessible. We

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republish such portion of the narrative as refers to Major Maxwell's experiences in the Northwest,—between the time he re-enlisted under Rogers, in the fall of 1760, to go to the Western ports, and the close of the Pontiac war in 1763, when he retired, for a time, to private life.— Ed.

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Three companies of Rangers were ordered to be enlisted for the war. I joined again [fall of 1760] with Capt. Brewer. Capts. Stark & M'Millan formed our corps, of about 150 men. We were then joined by 800 Regulars under Maj. [Henry] Gladwin, & ordered to march up the River & Lakes 214 to Detroit. Detroit, Mackinaw and all the Canadas, in fact, were surrendered to the British arms by the capitulation of Montreal. The River shut up and we were obliged to wait, about twenty miles above Montreal, for the winter. In the Spring we moved on & did not arrive at Detroit until about 215 Sept. '61. A party of us, (about 250) were at once ordered to Michilimackinaw, where we arrived, the last of October, & wintered there quietly.

In the latter part of May, 1762, we crossed Lake Superior, to the Grand Portage, at the northwest corner of the Lake, guarding, as we went, the goods of the Northwest Company. There we unloaded & rested a few days and returned to Mackinaw again some time in August. After a few days rest the Rangers returned to Detroit, reaching there the last of Sept. & encamped for the winter.

Next spring, '63, we were ordered to guard a Commissioner & a quantity of goods to Chicago, head of Lake Michigan. We went & returned. Nothing material happened. Now we supposed the war was at an end, and applied to Major Gladwin for our discharge, but he refused it, not having heard that the treaty had been ratified, and ordered us to remain. He ordered us to reconnoitre the country by the Rivers Rouge & Huron, to try to find a course by land to Chicago. We found the Indians cross, discontented, sullen. They would sell us no meat; they offered us no violence, nor we to them. We returned without

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discoveries & reported to the Commanding officer. He had got notice of a large party of Indians descending Lake Huron on their way to Detroit, but he knew nothing of their views. The Garrison was put in the best possible order of defence, and scouting parties kept out for a number of days, until we discovered them coming down Lake St. Clare in large numbers. They fell down the Detroit River and landed a little above the town. Then Pontiac, their chief, advanced with a flag to the gate, and stated that Pontiac of the West had come to make a treaty with his New Father, and wished to see the Comg. Officer. This was in August, '63. Major Gladwin informed him he would hold a treaty with him in about ten days, & that thirty six of his chiefs would be admitted to the council within the garrison & no more. That until that time not more than two or three Indians would be admitted into the Fort at a time, and they must be out at night. The night before the council were to meet, Major Gladwin got information from a friendly squaw, that the Indians intended to massacre the whole garrison whenever they got in. The Major ordered all under arms. We lay on our arms all night. Early in the morning we were formed in two lines from the gate of the Fort to the Council House. About nine in the morning, Pontiac with his thirty six Chiefs marched in through the lines.—He demanded that the troops be dismissed to their barracks. This was refused. The Major accused him of treachery and, upon examination, found everything as the squaw had told him. They were all armed, having cut off the barrels of their muskets, to conceal them under their blankets. Pontiac, with coolness, told the Majr. that he had come in by authority & under the protection of the Commanding Officer, & he demanded to be let out of the Garrison, with his chiefs. Majr. Gladwin let them go, and in five minutes after they got out, they commenced an attack upon us & kept up a severe fire for two days & nights. By means of cartloads of combustibles they set our pickets on fire several times.

Pontiac found out that we were short of provisions & ammunitions, & that there was a vessel, coming to relieve us, wind-bound about nine miles off at a place called Fighting Island. He determined to take it, & went down with a party in birch canoes, attacked & boarded her. Fortunately there was a man on board who, having been taken prisoner by

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the Indians, had acquired a knowledge of their language. Some of the hands cried out, "Blow her up!" This he communicated to Pontiac's party. They all left her & were off in their canoes in an instant. The wind soon came fair and the vessel got safe up under the guns of the Fort in less than two hours. The ammunition was landed and we were served with as much as we wanted. This put an end to our desperate situation. Pontiac now moved off.

The next day a foolish banter was got up, betwixt the British & Provincial officers, as to which corps would fight the best. Capt. D'E \*\*\* of the British Regulars said that the Provincial or Colonial Rangers could not cope with the Regulars in fighting the Indians. Capt. Stark said they could, and with much difficulty they prevailed upon Major Gladwin to let them march out about three miles and try 217 their skill with the Indians. This was the latter part of August. About 400 British went out & 150 Rangers, I among the number. We had gone about two miles & a half, when, in crossing a creek by a bridge, in some low, marshy ground above Detroit, we were completely ambushed. The slaughter was awful. The Indians fell on us like bloodhounds. At the first fire D'E\*\*\* and most of the British officers fell. We then clubbed our muskets & fought against the tomahawks. We retreated as fast as possible, but the Indians got between us and our Fort. Some of us broke through their lines and reached the Fort. Of all that went out, but about 70 Rangers and 150 British ever returned to Detroit. This Creek has ever since gone by the name of Bloody Bridge. On the bridge fell many British officers.

We had left about two hundred troops at Michilimackinac & were ignorant of their fate until after Pontiac attacked us. We then learned their sad story. Pontiac came with his warriors, very good naturedly, to the Fort at Michilimackinac and was refused entrance.<sup>1</sup> He then commenced a game of ball, near the Fort, very good-naturedly. Bye & bye the ball was knocked into the fort, as if by accident, and the soldiers threw it out. It was knocked in again & again, until an Indian was allowed to go in after it. Soon two went & when the Indians found the officers and soldiers a little off their guard, they all rushed into the gate & murdered every one in the Fort.

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1 The narrator is at fault. Pontiac was not personally engaged in the massacre at Michilimackinac.— Ed.

We lay at Detroit without interruption until the end of the war & were discharged some time in October. Thus ended my six years service.